



*RI Department of Education
in Partnership with the
RI Department of Health*

Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students

2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

December 2005

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is an anonymous and voluntary survey conducted among random samples of high school students in over 50 states, territories, and municipalities nationwide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the YRBS to monitor risk behaviors related to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. In the spring of 1997, 2001, and 2003, Rhode Island administered the YRBS randomly to 1,528, 1,392, and 1,814 adolescents, respectively. Response rates were 60%, 63%, and 66% for the three years. Weighted findings are representative of 9th to 12th grade public high school students statewide and can be used to make important inferences concerning health-risk behaviors.

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

There were significant trends for 12 of 35 key health risk behaviors observed in the 3 surveys over time (Figures 1, 2). Nine measures improved (i.e., lower risk), including seatbelt use, inhalant use, physical fighting, drinking and driving, weapon carrying, smoking cigarettes, smoking at school, drinking alcohol, and activity level in physical education classes. Only 3 measures had worsening trends (i.e., higher risk), including AIDS/HIV education, milk consumption, and moderate physical activity. The other 23 risk behaviors remained relatively stable over time.

Injury and Violence

The proportion of students not wearing seatbelts decreased substantially from 33% in 1997 to 16% in 2003, the greatest change occurring in 2001. Riding in a vehicle with a driver who had been drinking declined steadily from 36% to 28% across the 3 surveys. However, 79% of bicycle riders still did not wear a helmet in 2003 (Figure 3). Fighting decreased steadily from 35% to 28% between 1997 and 2003, while weapon carrying dropped from 18% in 1997 to 11% in 2001, stabilizing at 12% in 2003. One fourth of students felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in 2001 and 2003, and about one tenth attempted suicide in each of the 3 survey years.

Current Tobacco, Alcohol, and Marijuana Use

Current (i.e., within the past month) cigarette use decreased steeply and steadily from 35% to 19% between 1997 and 2003. Cigarette smoking at school displayed a similar trend. In 2003, current use of any tobacco (cigarettes, smokeless, cigars) was 23%, ranging from 18% for 9th graders to 29% for 12th graders (Figure 3). Although about half of all students in each survey year drank alcohol, current drinking declined significantly from 52% in 1997 to 45% in 2003, declining the most in 2003. Current marijuana use remained flat at about 30% for all 3 surveys.

Other Drug Use

Lifetime (i.e., at least one time ever) inhalant use declined by half to under 10% in 2003, while lifetime cocaine use remained relatively stable at 6%-10% between 1997 and 2003. About one tenth of students had ever tried ecstasy in 2003, but use varied by age from 7% among 9th graders to 11% for 12th graders (Figure 3).

Sexual Behaviors

Just over 40% of students in each survey reported ever having sex. The proportion having recent sex (last 3 months) was also stable at about one third. In contrast, having recent sex without a condom (a very high risk behavior) declined to 11%, the entire decrease confined to 2003. In 2003, 11% of students had 4 or more sexual partners (Figure 3), the highest percentage occurring among 12th graders (17%). More than 90% had AIDS/HIV education, but there was a significant decline from 95% in 1997 to 92% in 2003.

Weight Management and Dietary Behaviors

The proportion of students trying to lose weight (42%-44%), describing themselves as overweight (29%-31%), at risk of being overweight (14%-15%), or overweight (9%-10%) were very stable for the 3 surveys, although the discrepancy across the risk measures is striking (see Figure 1 for definitions). The overweight estimates may be low, however, as they are based on self-reported height and weight. Regarding nutrition, just over one quarter of students ate at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily in 2001 and 2003, whereas the proportion drinking 3 or more glasses of milk daily declined significantly from 23% to 19%.

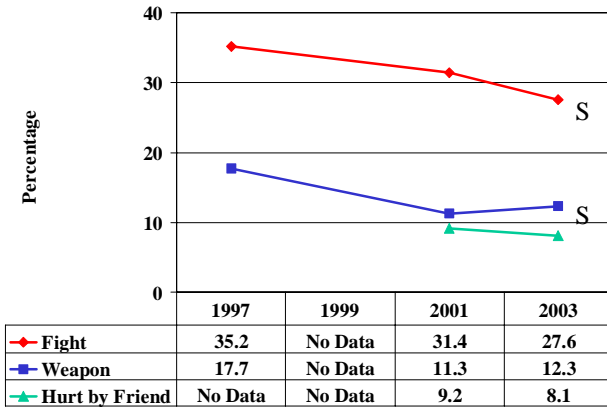
Physical Activity

There was a significant increase in **insufficient** moderate exercise to 78% in 2003, although **insufficient** vigorous exercise (about 38%) and lack of any exercise (about 10%) was stable across the surveys. The proportion of students reporting at least 20 minutes of exercise or sports in gym class increased significantly from 67% in 1997 to 83% in 2003. However, nearly one third of students in 2003 watched 3 or more hours of television on a school day (Figure 3), varying by age from 39% (9th graders) to 24% (12th graders).

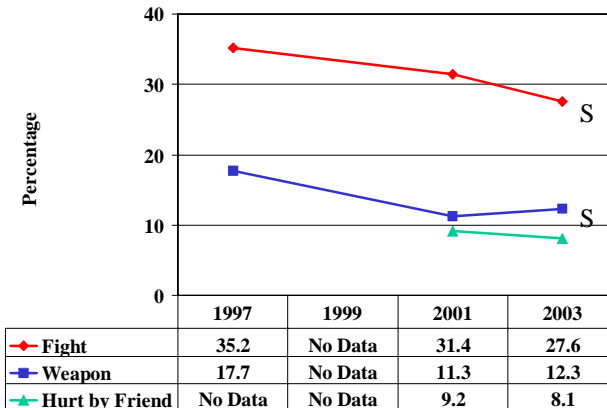
Figure 1 – Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, Grades 9-12, YRBS (1997, 2001, 2003)

Injury and Violence:

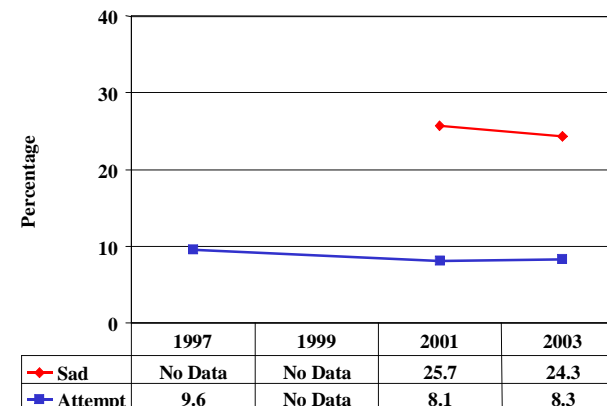
Percentage of Students Who Were in a Physical Fight in the Past Year; Carried a Weapon in the Past Month; Were Hit, Slapped, or Physically Hurt by a Boyfriend or Girlfriend in the Past Year



Percentage of Students Who Were in a Physical Fight in the Past Year; Carried a Weapon in the Past Month; Were Hit, Slapped, or Physically Hurt by a Boyfriend or Girlfriend in the Past Year

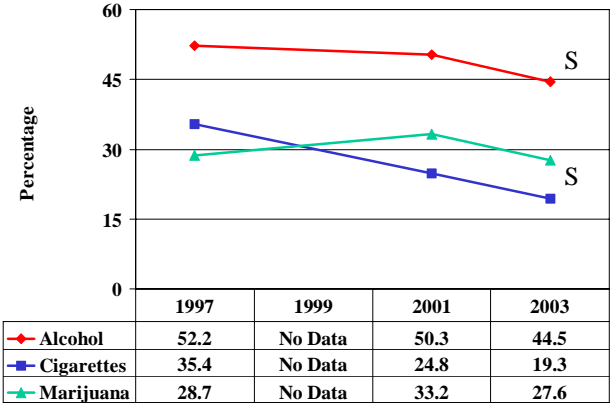


Percentage of Students Who Felt So Sad or Hopeless Almost Every Day for Two Weeks or More in a Row That They Stopped Doing Some Usual Activities in the Past Year; Attempted Suicide in the Past Year



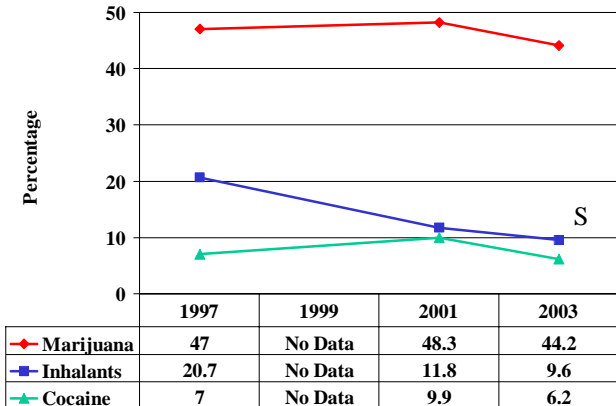
Current Tobacco, Alcohol, and Marijuana Use:

Percentage of Students Who Drank Alcohol; Smoked Cigarettes; Used Marijuana - in the Past Month



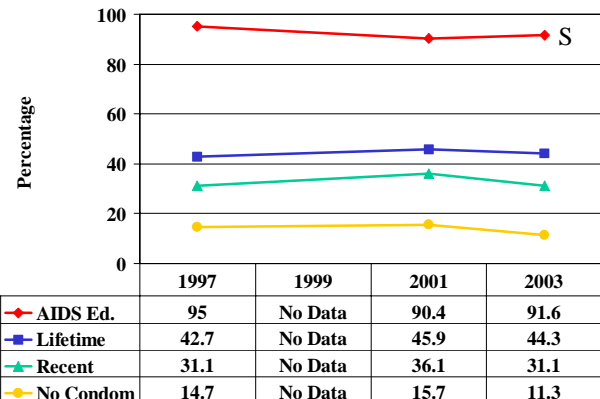
Other Drug Use:

Percentage of Students Who Have Ever Used Marijuana; Ever Used Inhalants to Get High; Ever Used Cocaine



Sexual Behaviors:

Percentage of Students Who Had Ever Been Taught About AIDS or HIV Infection in School; Ever Had Sex; Had Sex in the Past 3 Months; Had Sex in the Past 3 Months and Did Not Use a Condom the Last Time

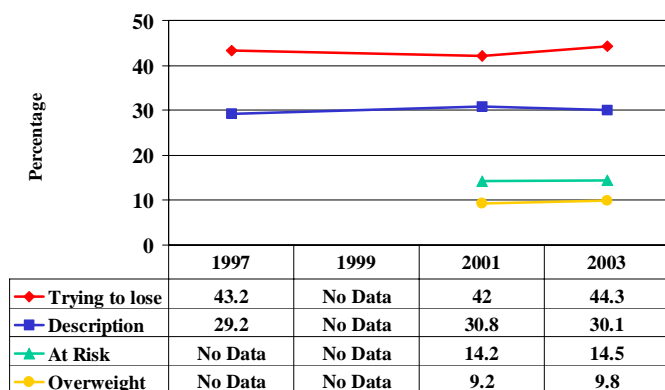


Note: An "S" in the line graph denotes a statistically significant linear change.
 Source: 1997 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1528)
 2001 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1392)
 2003 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1814)

Figure 1 (Continued) – Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students, Grades 9-12, YRBS (1997, 2001, 2003)

Weight Management and Dietary Behaviors:

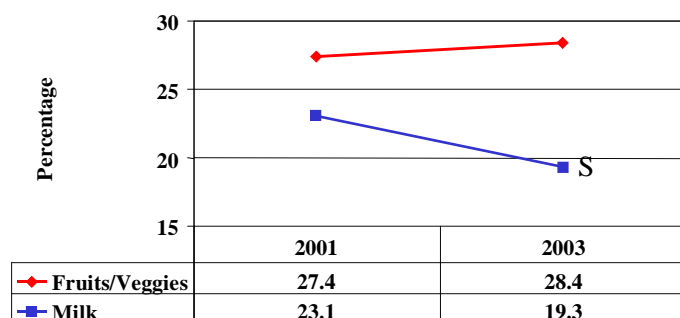
Percentage of Students Who Were Trying to Lose Weight; Described Themselves As Overweight; Are at Risk for Becoming Overweight*; Are Overweight**



* At or above the 85th percentile but below the 95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex based on reference data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I.

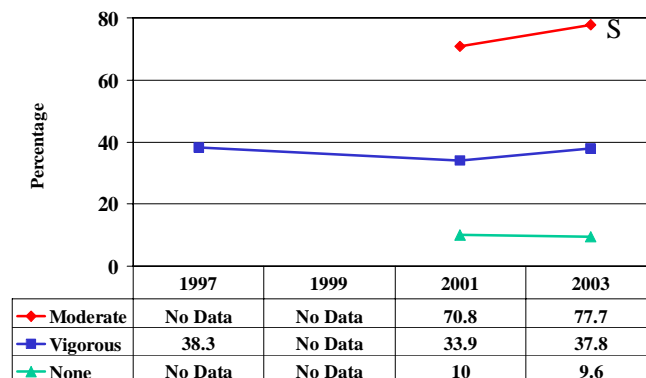
** At or above the 95th percentile for body mass index by age and sex based on reference data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey I.

Percentage of Students Who Ate Five or More Servings of Fruit and Vegetables Per Day; Drank Three or More Glasses of Milk Per Day – in the Past Week



Physical Activity:

Percentage of Students Who Had Insufficient Moderate Physical Activity*; Insufficient Vigorous Physical Activity**; Did Not Participate in Any Vigorous or Moderate Physical Activity - in the Past Week



* Moderate physical activity is defined as participation in physical activities that do not make you sweat or breathe hard. The recommendation calls for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 or more days per week.

** Vigorous physical activity is defined as exercise or participation in physical activities that make you sweat or breathe hard. The recommendation calls for at least 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity on 3 or more days per week.

Percentage of Students Who Attended PE Class 1+ Days in an Average School Week; Exercised or Played Sports Over 20 Minutes in an Average PE Class (Among Students Enrolled in PE)

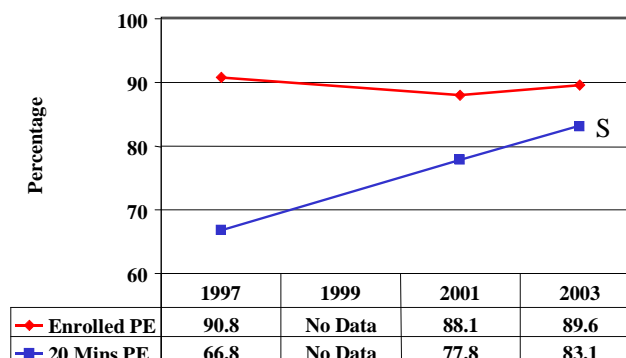
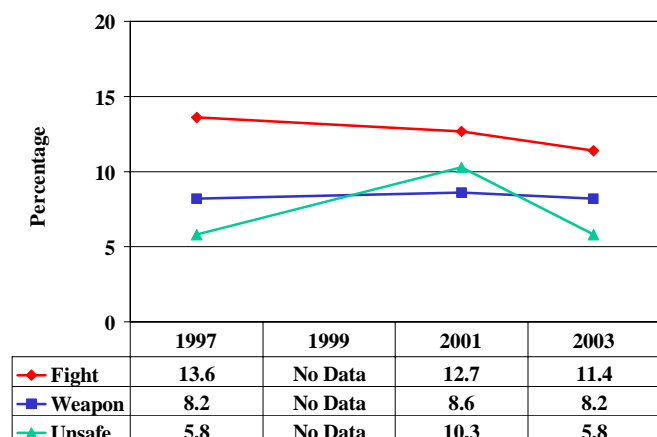
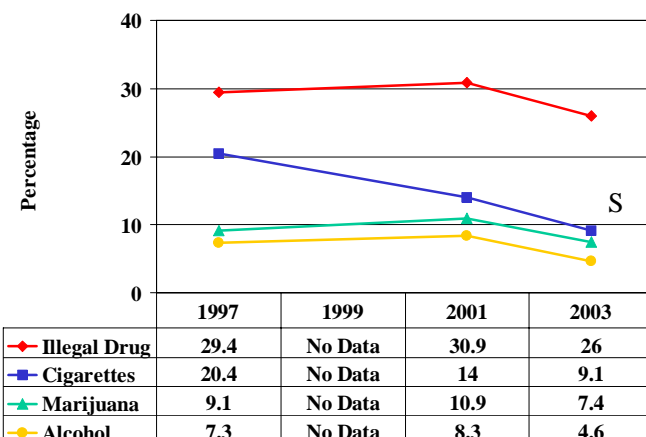


Figure 2 – Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students Occurring on School Property, Grades 9-12, YRBS (1997, 2001, 2003)

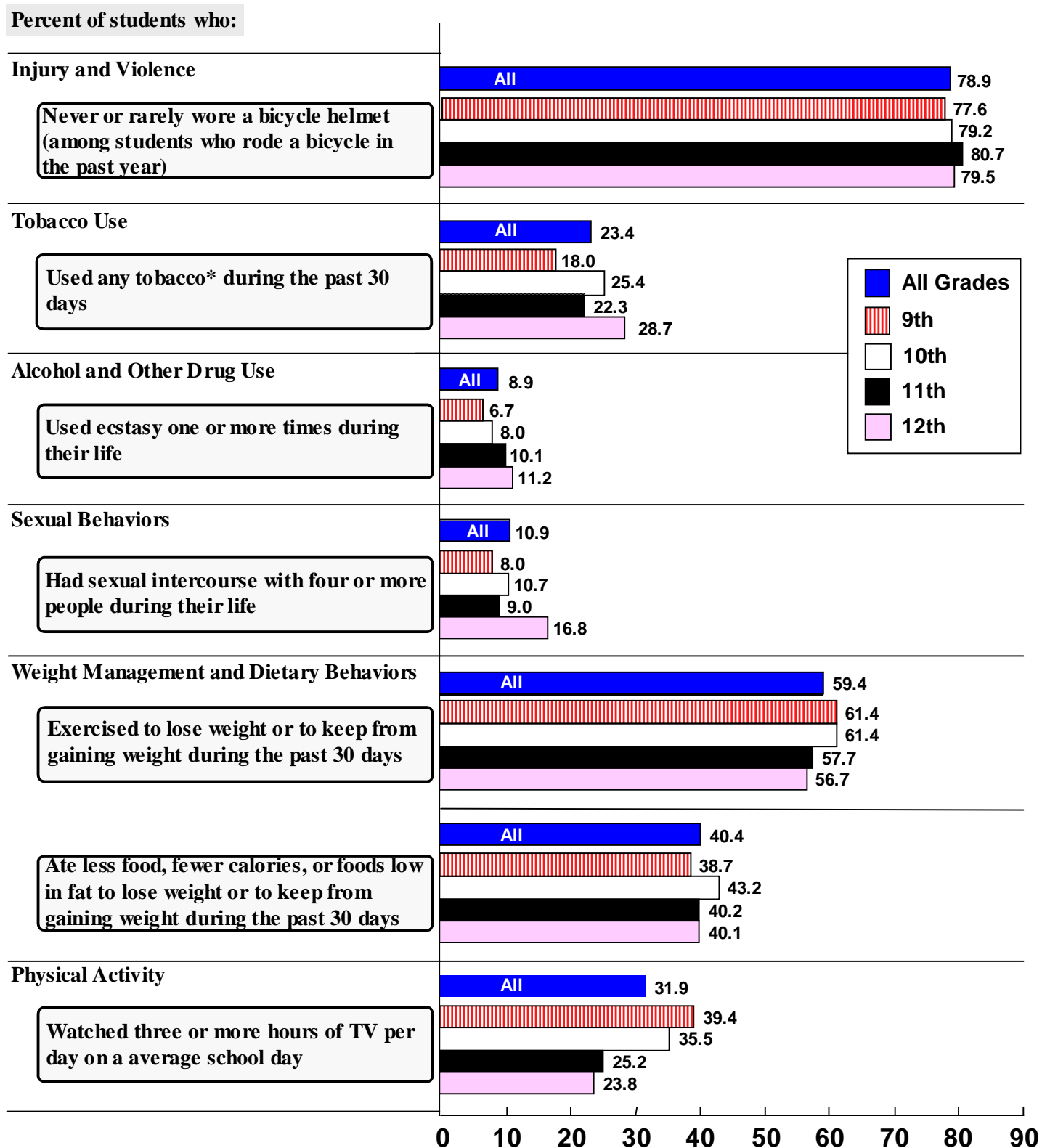
Percentage of Students Who Were in a Physical Fight on School Property in the Past Year; Were Threatened or Injured With a Weapon on School Property in the Past Year; Did Not Go to School Because They Felt Unsafe in the Past Month



Percentage of Students Who Were Offered, Sold, or Given an Illegal Drug; Smoked Cigarettes; Used Marijuana; Drank Alcohol – on School Property in the Past Month



**Figure 3 - Health Risks Among Rhode Island Public High School Students,
By Grades, 2003 YRBS**



* Includes cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, cigars, cigarillos, or little cigars.

Source: 2003 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=1814)